



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Proposed Rule for Continuation of the Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps Marine Reserves Available for Public Review and Comment

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has published a proposed rule in the Federal Register that, if approved, would implement the regulatory actions proposed in Amendment 21 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP). The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has submitted the FMP for review by NOAA Fisheries. NOAA Fisheries announced the availability of the FMP for public comment on December 10, 2003.

NOAA Fisheries is now requesting comments from the public regarding the proposed rule. The regulatory actions described in the proposed rule would modify the fishing restrictions that apply within the Madison-Swanson sites and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, and would extend the period of effectiveness of those restrictions through June 16, 2010. Written comments on the proposed rule must be received on or before February 19, 2004. See the **Addresses** section at the end of this bulletin for information on where and how to submit comments.

Summary of Proposed Rule

The intended effect of these proposed regulations is to protect the spawning aggregations of species within these areas, prevent overfishing, and aid in the evaluation of the effectiveness of marine reserves as a management tool.

Specifically, within these marine reserves, this proposed rule would:

(1) Prohibit the possession of Gulf reef fish year-round, except for possession aboard a vessel in transit with fishing gear appropriately stowed;

(2) During November through April, prohibit all fishing and possession of any fish species, with

exception of Highly Migratory Species (Tuna/Swordfish/Shark and Billfish), and for fish possessed aboard a vessel in transit with gear appropriately stowed; and

(3) During May through October, restrict fishing activity to surface trolling only.

Addresses

The FMP, which includes a Regulatory Impact Review (RIR), Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, Environmental Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, and a Fishery Impact Statement, is available from:

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
The Commons at Rivergate
3018 North U.S. Highway 301, Suite 1000
Tampa, Florida, 33619-2272
Phone: 813-228-2815; fax: 813-225-7015
e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

NOAA Fisheries prepared a Supplementary Regulatory Impact Review and Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis that augments the findings of the FMP's RIR. This supplemental analysis is available from the Fisheries Economics Office, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702.

Written copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702. Electronic copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from the Federal Register website at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

Comments regarding the proposed rule should be sent to Mr. Phil Steele at NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St.

Petersburg, FL 33702. Comments may be submitted via fax to 727-570-5583. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet.

All comments on the proposed rule must be received before 4:30 p.m., eastern time, on February 19, 2004.. Comments on non-regulatory actions in the FMP are being accepted through February 9, 2004. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries on the FMP

or the proposed rule will be addressed in any final rule that is published to implement the actions proposed in the FMP.

This and other news releases are available on the Southeast Regional Office homepage at <http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov/>. NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce.